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The Appeal of the Middle West to the Literary Historian

By DAN ELBERT CLARK

The Middle West, long recognized as of vital importance in the political and material life of the Nation, is rapidly coming to its own in the realm of letters. Authors, no matter what their fields, need no longer apologize for finding their themes in the Mississippi Valley. Especially is this new recognition to be found among historians. A few years ago the number of scholarly books and monographs dealing with western history was extremely small. To-day one need only consult the announcements of publishing houses and the lists of theses being prepared in American colleges and universities to be impressed with the fact that the Atlantic seaboard region no longer receives the entire attention of our historians.

Moreover, a chair of western American history has been established at Harvard University and is occupied by the man who deserves chief credit for bringing about this change of attitude among historians; while similar instruction is offered in nearly all the principal universities of the country. The

State historical societies, likewise, have had their full share in this movement. Almost without exception these institutions in the Middle West are now administered by young men thoroughly trained in the methods of historical research, and enthusiastic in the cause of western history. For nearly ten years a Mississippi Valley Historical Association has been holding annual and semi-annual meetings, and publishing volumes of proceedings, besides a quarterly periodical more recently established.

But it is not so much of this new and deserved interest that the writer wishes to speak, but rather of the peculiar appeal which there is in western history and of the opportunities that lie in wait for men and women with the ability to write history that will at the same time be real literature. He must indeed be devoid of any spark of imagination who could write coldly or prosaically the story of the Great Valley. The dramas of savage life that were enacted here before the coming of the white man; the wanderings and adventures of the French explorers, *coureurs de bois*, traders, and settlers; the plans and activities of French and Spanish and British, including Napoleon's dream of empire in the New World, before at last the valley came entirely into the possession of the young republic; the great westward movement which, it has been said, will be the theme when the national epic is written—these and many other phases of our valley's history are strongly tinged with romance.

The "dry-as-dust" historian has done much, and much remains for him to do. Nor should his labors ever be without their due reward in appreciation and recognition. He is the pioneer who blazes the way and sets up landmarks without which later comers, less patient and untrained in such pioneering, would be utterly lost. But even in his most sanguine moments he can not hope that his writings will be read outside of a small circle of kindred spirits. His function is to dig out the ore of truth from the mountains of original source materials.

Now it seldom happens that the miner who digs the ore is capable of extracting the precious metal and fashioning it into something that is bright and beautiful and attractive. Likewise, the historian is rare who has been able to combine truthfulness and accuracy with a literary style that makes his writings appeal to the lay reader. To be sure, several notable exceptions in the world's history at once suggest themselves. It would be interesting to learn, however, just how many people in the Middle West know that a historian whose writings have been declared by competent authority to belong "among the world's few masterpieces of the highest rank, along with the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon," spent the greater part of his life in recording the history of the French in Canada and in the Mississippi Valley.

Those who have never tasted the delights of Francis Parkman's works and have always regarded history as a subject to be studied rather than read, have

in store for them not only a surprise but a rich treat if they will open his *Pioneers of France in the New World*, and then follow through the eight or ten succeeding volumes the marvelous story which he tells. No tale of adventure in strange lands and among savage peoples is more fascinating than this story from a master hand, relating in vivid, glowing language the experiences of the intrepid Frenchmen who made known the length and breadth of the Great Valley before the English colonists had lost sight of the Atlantic coast. And yet Francis Parkman was not a writer of fiction: he is acknowledged as America's greatest historian.

But perchance the layman may hesitate to undertake the reading of a work which is composed of so many volumes. Fortunately there are other writers with the fine gift of imagination who have found in the Mississippi Valley the subjects for their art. In this group should be included a son of Iowa, John Carl Parish, from whose pen there appeared about three years ago a book bearing the title *The Man with the Iron Hand*.

From the viewpoint of the red savages in the Illinois country and along the banks of the Mississippi River, Dr. Parish tells the story of the coming of the first white men—of Marquette and Joliet; of La Salle and Tonty, his faithful lieutenant whose Indian name furnishes the title for the book; and of Father Hennepin and Michael Ako. Every statement in this "True Tale" can be verified by original manuscripts and records. Nevertheless, it is a book

which the boy or girl of fourteen or the adult, alike, can read without once being conscious that he is reading history.

And now from the press of Charles Scribner's Sons comes *The French in the Heart of America*, written by John Finley, Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York. Born near historic "Starved Rock" on the Illinois River where La Salle built his Fort St. Louis, he writes, as he says, with a "love for the boundless stretch of prairie and plain whose virgin sod I have broken with my plough; of the lure of the waterways and roads where I have followed the boats and the trails of French voyageurs and coureurs de bois; and of the possessing interest of the epic story of the development of that most virile democracy known to the world."

Most of what was written in this book was first spoken in France, the primary purpose of Dr. Finley being to bring before the minds of the people of that land the part which their ancestors played long years ago in the New World, and "the vigorous, hopeful, achieving life that is passing before that Gallic background of venturing and praying." He writes "not as a scholar," he says, but as an "academic coureur de bois," telling of what he has "known and seen in the Valley of Democracy, the fairest and most fruitful of the regions where France was pioneer in America." And thus he has written, beautifully and with the touch of the true artist, not a history of the French in America, to

be sure, but the story of the brave men who risked their lives to win the valley of the Mississippi for their country and their God, and of the marvelous changes that came over the valley during the century which followed the final disappearance of the lillies of France from this continent. Here again, the critics have been able to point out only a few very inconsequential errors of fact.

When three such men, to say nothing of many others, have found it not only worth while, but a pleasure as well, to use their talents in portraying with all their literary powers, the history of French adventure in the Mississippi Valley, other aspiring writers may rest assured that they will not be wasting their abilities when they choose subjects in the history of the Middle West. Besides, nothing more conclusive is needed than the works of these three men to prove that history may be written not only accurately and according to scientific methods, but also in such a manner as to entitle it to rank as real literature.

The Garden in September

By HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

Chill drives the wind across this lonely space
Sadder beneath the sky than any rain,
And wanly now the ineffectual sun
Gleams, and the pale light fades and leaves no stain,
As those faint ripples on the pool leave none,
As wind across the grasses leaves no trace.

The bleached asters stare with mournful eyes
Upon their scrawny stems of dying leaves;
The stricken peonies droop that now no foot
Goes by them where the swaying grape-vine grieves,
And foliage plants like withered beggars mute
With obscure prayer beseech the autumn skies.

Against the eastern wall the hollyhocks
In wild confusion of a wasted dream
Toss vacantly like branches in a wood,
Or bend like willows slanting toward a stream,
And over-ripe, their flowers are as blood
Clotted and dark upon their yellow stalks.

And all around, the dank discolored wall
With crumbling woodbine laden, and below
The moss grows in the cracks of the stained walks,
And water stands where tiles are sunken. So
All things are dying here, where only stalks
Of old flowers toss, and dead leaves clash and fall. . .

O beauty over-ripe and to disuse
Fallen in this supreme and strange decay,
Dying. . . yet never dead. . . When shall you die,
When sleep, O grass, O flowers, where no birds stay,
No April maidens pass and dream, whereby
No poets mutter at the world's abuse?

*The golden girls are sleeping a strange sleep,
Some with the lads they loved and more alone,
But all asleep, too worn for any dream
To trouble them, too tired for any moan —
Were words there spoken? Was it the soft scream
Of rubbing branches that the cedars keep?*

Or noise of rustling grass in one high urn,
Forever troubled by the keening wind?—
*The garden may not die, though lads are dead
Who walked within it, loved and laughed and sinned;
The lilies tremble in the lily bed—
The maidens long ago have ceased to yearn.*

Still dance the shrivelled asters wearily,
And still the woodbine mutters to the grass,
The cedars moan like one gone gently mad
And can not sleep or die. . . O April lass,
*Give thanks, with joy give thanks, O laughing lad,
That you are other than these flowers be!*

Uncle Al

By ESTHER FREDERICK

White maple chips, shining in the morning sunlight, glanced off into the snow at each measured fall of Al's ax. As the big branch cracked away from the trunk of the fallen tree, Al ceased chopping and drew a deep breath. Slowly he pulled out a red handkerchief from the pocket of his chore coat and rubbed his face meditatively, pushing back the ragged fringe of graying hair under his rusty cap. For a short time he stood gazing out across the dazzling expanse of snow-covered pasture to the far-off horizon, where the dull gray of the sky and the blue of the faint winter haze met and melted into one tone.

A chickadee piped its song nearby and presently, emboldened, flew down into the pile of brush not far from Al. The short, irregular flight caught the man's eye and he watched with interest the prying search of the tiny bird in and out the heap of freshly-cut branches. He whistled, softly at first, then louder as the bird stopped and, tipping its head to one side, regarded him with a slantwise gaze of bright curiosity.

"Uncle Al!" Jimmy had been industriously pursuing investigations among what had been the top-most boughs of the fallen maple. "Uncle Al, what sort of a bird's nest's this?"

"That's an oriole's nest," decided Al, looking at the closely-woven bag-shaped nest of horsehair.

"You remember he's orange and black and always stays 'way up in the top of the tree, singing."

"They's some funny-looking things on the bark," continued Jimmy. "Just little gray things, and something inside of them wiggles when you pull them open."

"Don't hurt them, Jimmy. They're just lying quiet through the winter. They'll be butterflies some day if you let 'em alone,—butterflies or maybe moths. I don't like to see anything hurt when there ain't no need for it."

"All right," said Jimmy cheerfully. "I just wanted to see what was inside o' them."

He resumed his searchings among the scattered boughs while Al leaned on his ax and watched the small boy musingly. Jimmy's constant reference to his wisdom and judgment always left him vaguely pleased, he never knew just why. Jimmy was so different from his father. Only that morning, Jimmy's father, Al's older brother, had expressed frankly just what his opinion was of such a shiftless fellow as Al.

"Somehow, you're always scatter-brained," he had said angrily. "I guess father knew what he was about when he didn't leave any of the Watson land to you. 'Course you get your living, but goodness knows you couldn't hold onto no property."

And Al had meekly held his silence and wondered dumbly why Jim couldn't be a mite easier in his faultfinding. Now he was thinking of the dim hope he had always had,—the hope which Jim's inces-

sant complainings were changing to an undefined longing, the hope for an opportunity to show Jim that he could do something if he had a good chance. He wasn't so anxious to start out for himself, he didn't want to leave the home place where he had spent his whole life, but he did want to show Jim that he could do something. The idea was growing in Al's mind. It was becoming more insistent. Perhaps, though, he couldn't do what he would set out to do; and, anyway, no one would give him a chance. And Jim didn't mean half what he said. He hadn't been feeling good this morning and got mad quicker than usual, that was all.

"Uncle Al! Uncle Al!" Jimmy's call rose shriller. "I'm hungry. Ain't you most through with that log? Pa said you'd finish this morning. Will you?" Before Al could answer, he continued, "I'm goin' to the house to get something to eat 'cause ma's baking this morning." And he was gone up the path by the snowy pasture fence.

"Finish this morning?" Al squinted at the sun. "Must be 'most 'leven," he muttered. "I'll have to hurry."

The sun climbed higher and shone down more warmly on the laboring man. The little chickadee, which had flown away, came back and teetered and swung on the bare bough of a nearby box elder. Its piping call brought no response from Al, however. He was working away manfully at a large branch of the fallen maple, steadily chopping although his breath came short and the tufts of light

hair on his forehead were plastered down with perspiration. But finally he ceased his strenuous work, looked again at the sun, and, after driving his ax into a convenient log, started stiffly up along the pasture fence.

As he went through the gate and across the barnyard, a gray horse thrust his head out of one of the windows in the basement of the barn and whinnied shrilly. In response to the implied request, Al entered the barn and, taking a pan of oats and some ears of corn, went to the farthest box stall. The horse, a slender, quick iron-gray, whickered eagerly as he approached, then fell to crunching at the corn.

"Well, Prince," Al ran a gentle hand over the thick mane, "pretty lonesome in here, isn't it? Reckon I'll have to take you out for a spin this evening even if the roads is pretty bad."

Prince only snorted from the depths of the feed box and so Al left the barn and proceeded to the house. He closed the gate carefully behind him, shuffled up the walk, and sat down on the edge of the back porch to pull off his heavy overshoes.

"Go off, Pet, I don't want you." A black cat, purring loudly, had come running and was now walking back and forth across his lap, rubbing its head on his dirty jacket and waving its tail in his face. Al, after ridding himself of his overshoes and drawing on a pair of shabby carpet slippers, was stroking the ardent Pet when the kitchen door opened and Jim came out, picking his teeth. His tall spare figure slouched forward and his square

chin was dark with a week's growth of stubbly black beard.

"Fellow here just now," he announced shortly. "Wants to rent the eighty down the other side of the schoolhouse. He's going to bach it and wants to hire a man to help him. Said he'd heard of my brother and wanted to know if you could come and work for him. He's pretty green about farming and I guess he thought he'd get somebody that knew something about it. I told him you wasn't no force, but he just laughed and said he knew what the Watsons was like. I seen it wasn't no use to argue with him,—Get out of here," he kicked at Pet who was rubbing around his feet, "—and so I told him I'd leave it with you. Good chance for you,—if you care to take it," he added sarcastically, watching contemptuously the trembling hand stroking the black cat. "But you'd better come to dinner. The others are 'most through, and Mary's rushed with work as it is, without having to wait dinner."

Jim went into the house, leaving Al still stroking the loudly responsive Pet and gazing vaguely into space.

At length Al rose slowly and went into the low-ceilinged kitchen, hot and smoky with the fumes of fried pork. Jim had completed his meal and was gone, but his wife and little Jimmy were still seated at the small table in the middle of the kitchen. Al silently washed himself at the low sink in the corner nearest the door and dried his face on the dingy crash towel that hung limply from its roller. Then,

with a sidewise glance at Mrs. Watson, a large, blond woman, who was eating in severe silence, he took his place at the table and helped himself to some of the fried meat swimming in a platter of fast congealing grease.

"Uncle Al!" exclaimed Jimmy, halting a spoonful of potatoes in mid-air. "Shep kin roll over. I taught him. He didn't like it, but I told him an' then I pushed and now he don't have to be pushed." With a triumphant flourish, Jimmy put the spoonful into his mouth.

"Well!" said Al with interest. "Ye want to teach him to carry a stick like a gun and then salute. Remember I was telling you about the dog me and your father used to have?" Jimmy was incapable of speech but he nodded an eager assent. "Well, he could—" and Al launched into an animated narrative of the accomplishments of the wonderful dog. Jimmy forgot even his dinner in his uncle's story. The two were roused by Mrs. Watson's brisk rising.

"Well," she said as she gathered up her dishes and carried them heavily to the table near the stove. "You people'd better hurry if you want any dinner. I've had it ready since twelve, and it's 'most one now. First Jim didn't come and now you two have got to putter around as if you didn't care whether you got anything to eat or not. Hurry up now," she said to the startled pair. "I've got stacks to do this afternoon." She moved about rapidly, tying a brown gingham apron about her large waist,

taking down a battered dishpan from a hook near the window, and clattering the dishes into it.

"What'd that man want?" she suddenly demanded of Al. "Jim didn't say anything about it."

"He wants to rent the eighty down by the school-house," said Al in a subdued voice.

"Is he going to farm it by himself?"

"No-o, he's going to get a man. He said he wants me to help him," Al volunteered.

Mrs. Watson wheeled about. "You!" she ejaculated. "Well," turning back to the dishpan, "I suppose he knows what he wants. You'll go, of course?"

"Uncle Al, you ain't a-going away, are you?" Jimmy puckered his face and opened his mouth ready for a bellow of despair.

"Jimmy, hush!" commanded his mother. "I won't have you squalling around here. You've done enough this morning to try the patience of a saint."

Al glanced at Jimmy, opened his lips to speak, and then said nothing. Instead, he emptied his coffee cup and, pushing his chair back across the floor, shuffled quickly out.

That afternoon he still worked at the fallen maple. The sun was shining as brightly as ever and the snowdrifts along the fence were beginning to melt, leaving a thin fragile shell to outline their former shapes. The warm afternoon sunlight had brought out all the winter birds and they fluttered and wrangled among the red-budded tips of the maple boughs. A faint smell came from the bared patches of moist sod on the southern slopes of the pasture.

In spite of his work Al's mind turned constantly to the things about him. But he kept coming back just as constantly to what Jim had told him. He wondered what sort of man the stranger was. His mind turned to the proposition that had been made him. It was his chance,—he knew that. But supposing the man would scold as Jim did and would be as hard to please. Of course he wanted his chance,—he always had. But it had always seemed far-off and indefinite. Now that the chance had come, he felt dismayed at his utter lack of enthusiasm. He didn't want to go. It was better to stay at home with those that he knew and that knew him. It was better to be scolded by Jim than by a stranger. With Jim it was different. Jim was his brother and then,—oh, well, he was Jim, and if Jim wanted to say things, he could. He didn't mean them, anyway. But a stranger—. With an air of finality, and decision, Al picked up his ax again.

He was chopping steadily when the sound of a voice interrupted him. A tall, thin young man was picking his way toward him among the heaps of brush. Al noticed that the young man wore "city" clothes and had the air of being accustomed to them.

"How do you do?" said the newcomer pleasantly. "You're Mr. Watson, aren't you?"

Al stared. "Jim isn't at home this afternoon," he said doubtfully. "But if they's anything you want—."

"But I don't want to see your brother," insisted the young man. "I want to see you. I'm Walt

Morris. I'm going to rent that land of your brother's down by the schoolhouse, and I want you to help me run it. I've been talking with Mr. Prescott down the road and I believe that you'll just suit me."

Al looked up to meet the frank blue eyes and then dropped his gaze and shifted his ax from one hand to the other. "I ain't much force at workin'." he said in a low voice.

Morris threw back his head and laughed a clear hearty laugh. "Well, neither am I. I believe we'll get along beautifully. You think it over and let me know any time before the first of March. That's when I take possession. Do you know," he continued animatedly, taking off his fur cap and running his fingers through his curly brown hair. "Do you know, I've been down there nosing around already. I hired a cutter this noon and came out to see my new possession; I've decided several things already. You know that little back porch?" Al nodded. "Well, that's where I'm going to sleep. Doctor's orders," he added, giving his chest a significant thump. "That's why I'm leaving town for a simple bucolic existence. And," he ran on, smiling at Al's bewilderment, "I've decided where I'm going to have my kitchen garden and where I'll have my flower beds. And—."

"They's lots of flowers around there in summer," interrupted Al eagerly. "Our folks used to live there before they built the house up here, and mother planted lots of hardy annuals and bushes. They's

a whole row of lilacs and some snowball bushes and cabbage roses, and then there's phlox and sweet rocket and tigerlilies and—, oh, lots of things. Jim turned the milk cows into the yard last fall, but I don't think they et much."

"We *will* have a flower garden," exclaimed the young man who had been closely watching Al's eager face. "I imagine we can have a menagerie, too, without much trouble. There was a squirrel who fairly extended paws of welcome to me, and a couple of bluejays were positively a nuisance in their effusive greeting. They flew about me and screamed at me so that I wondered what I had done."

"That's Chip, that squirrel," said Al. "I found him last summer, when he was just a baby, an' me and Jimmy raised him on milk. Mary and Jim wouldn't have him around an' so when he was growed we took him down to the old house and turned him loose. I take him nuts sometimes, and the bluejays always beg some too. They can crack a nut the prettiest,—just whack at it with their bills until they drive a hole clean through it."

While the two were talking, the sun's strength had begun to dwindle and the shadows grew less distinct and fell more slantingly across the snow. The change was gradual, but slowly a chill crept into the air and the spirit of winter asserted itself.

Morris suddenly moved. "I must be going. It's getting late, and my team will be wondering what

has become of me. Well, good-bye. Let me hear from you soon," and he was gone.

Smiling vaguely, Al stood and watched the thin figure until it was out of sight. With a long-drawn sigh he looked around at the maple logs and at the low sun. Then he smiled again to himself and, hoisting his ax to his shoulder, started for the house, whistling in an odd, tuneless way.

As he came through the big gate into the barnyard, he heard wails and the sound of sharp scolding from the direction of the house. Jimmy was being whipped again. Al stopped with the gate half-open, and frowned, as he listened. Then he went on about his chores. He did not whistle, however, and even to the transports of Shep, who came racing around the barn, he gave only an abstracted recognition.

It was almost fully dark when he carried the last pitchforkful of hay to the eager cows in the stanchion row and went to the house for supper. Jim was not yet home and Mrs. Watson was alone in the dimly lighted kitchen.

"Where's Jimmy?" she demanded sharply.

"Why,—why, I ain't seen Jimmy since noon," said Al wonderingly.

"Not seen him since noon? Hasn't he been down to the barn with you?"

"Why, no."

"Well, I supposed that was where he'd go first thing. He'd been pestering me all day and finally he got something into his head about your goin'

away and then he bothered me worse 'n ever. I told him I'd spank him, but he's just like Jim,—when he once gets an idea into his head he'll never get it out again. So I just took him out and whipped him." She settled a pan on the stove with vigor and looked defiantly at Al, who was fingering the end of the towel he had just finished using.

"Don't you s'pose if you called him,—" he began.

"Yes, I reckon he'll come quick enough when he knows supper's ready." She stepped out on the porch.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" There was no answer. Over in the shed a sheep moved uneasily and the clear tinkle of its bell came to her.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" An echo came back from the orchard hollow and then the night was still. Mrs. Watson turned quickly into the house.

"Al! Al! Where do you s'pose Jimmy's gone? Oh, he's lost or something's happened to him. Oh, if Jim was only here!" Her big fingers twisted and crumpled a corner of her brown apron.

"Jimmy ain't lost," asserted Al stoutly, trying to hide his growing anxiety. "He knows too much for that. But—," he hesitated helplessly at the other possibility.

"Oh, Al, for goodness sakes, go and hunt him. It's just because I whipped him. He never stays out alone so late,—never."

"He ain't gone far," said Al, pulling on his cap with trembling fingers. "I'll—I'll find him."

Once outside, Al found his courage and assurance

falling away from him. He wondered vaguely what had possessed Jimmy and he looked about in bewilderment, trying to decide where to hunt for the child. When he did start out, his mind was a tumult of thoughts that confused him and sent him wandering and calling from one building to another.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" He searched through the barn. Poor little kid! He was always getting into a fuss with his mother or father. They were hard on him, too. Then Al wondered why Jimmy had not come to him as he always did. It was all so strange.

"Jimmy!" He wasn't in the buildings here. There was only the sheep barn over by the orchard, and beyond, bleak fields swept by the cold wind.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" The sheep stirred uneasily as the call rang through the dark, cold stillness of the barn. There was no answer, and Al stood by the east door staring out past the two mushroom-shaped strawstacks near the barn across the fields. A strange panic was growing in him. Where was Jimmy? And why had he run off like this. Out of the confusion of Al's mind Mrs. Watson's words came back: "got something into his head about your goin' away." A conclusion began to force itself upon Al's bewildered wits. That was why Jimmy had run off so. As Al realized this, he grasped the post by the side of the door and stared blankly out toward the dim east. Then he suddenly roused himself and stepped quickly out into the chilly darkness. He didn't know what he was going to do but he must be moving,—he could not bear to remain still.

"Jimmy!" he gave a last despairing call. There was a little stir among the straw that was thickly littered about the nearest stack.

"Uncle Al!" said a little voice faintly.

Al ran over to the stack. "Oh, Jimmy," he said, picking up the little fellow, "Oh, Jimmy, you scared me so."

"Uncle Al," said Jimmy, "Ma said—. That man—Oh, Uncle Al, you ain't a-goin' away, are you?" He burst into sobs and hid his face on Al's neck.

Al looked away across the fields. For a moment his eyes turned in the direction of the little house by the schoolhouse. Then he looked down at the child in his arms.

"Goin' away from you?" he said cheerfully. "Why, 'course I ain't, honey."

With Ishmael

By WILLARD WATTLES

Oh, hearts were made for stay-at-homes
Who build a little fire,
But feet were made for wanderers
Whose ankles never tire.

And hands were made for those who love,
And lips for love to press;
But feet were made for gypsy-folk
To know no weariness.

For doors were made for householders
Who sleep the night inside;
But feet were made of knowing flesh
By flinty road-sides tried.

They say that arms are strong to hold,
And yielding lips are sweet;
It may be well for sober folk
Who have forgot their feet.

But I,—I have a going foot,
It will not let me stay;
I bid good morrow to my host,
And buss his dame good-day.

Ishmael had a going foot,—
Under a faery spell,
Out upon the crags of life
I camp with Ishmael.

The Midland Library

There is a labor of love in the *Anthology of Magazine Verse*, compiled by William Stanley Braithwaite,—the exhaustive, detailed labor of choosing from enormous quantities of verse a few things that are worthy of more permanent preservation,—a work that could be done only by one genuinely interested in the art. Such efforts to make a general appraisal of contemporary verse stimulate wider and more careful reading of poetry, and, in bringing forth counter-criticisms in many cases, lead toward well-balanced, universal judgments.

No two critics attempting this task would agree on the contents of an anthology. With this obvious reservation, it must be said that the result of Mr. Braithwaite's labor is eminently satisfying. There is catholicity and saneness in his selection; no leaning toward "schools" of poetry, no bias for certain themes, no conservative adherence to a small company of established periodicals. He has sought for good verse wherever it was to be found—East, West, North and South, daily newspapers and magazines.

We might expect this from his introductory comments on *Freedom of Poetry as an Art*, and from his clarifying judgment of the Imagists. He gives them credit for doing what great poets have done before them: breaking "the traditional regularities of form," but imposing "technical obligations upon themselves which only the most rigorous and persistent labors could accomplish."

Here is what he has to say about Mahlon Leonard Fisher, who has contributed to THE MIDLAND during the past year:

"I want to reaffirm my statement of two years ago concerning the sonnets of Mahlon Leonard Fisher; he is one of the very best sonnet-writers in the entire history of American poetry, and the two here included, *July* and *If One Should Come*, are as good as any he has written. We are still looking forward to a volume by this poet which will definitely assert his place in the public mind."

The immense amount of detail to be incorporated in a volume which has necessarily a limited period for preparation and publication no doubt accounts for some of the typographical errors. The printer failed to italicize the *must* in the first line of Mahlon Leonard Fisher's sonnet, *July*, and there is *grasping* instead of *gasping* in the eighth line.

The volume, however, is tastefully bound and printed. There is a harmony between the make-up and the purpose and contents of the *Anthology*.

Nowadays many of us are profoundly interested in farm life, with its problems and its possibilities. To such, *The Holy Earth*, by L. H. Bailey, brings a real and welcome message. This is the central teaching of his message: the earth is inherently a holy thing and an obligation rests upon every possessor of a portion of it to treat that portion with due regard for its holiness. The writer urges good care of the natural resources to provide for the needs of generations to come, and—which is the more original contribution—the treasuring of the beauty of the earth as a power for good. Mr. Bailey is a firm believer in the value of "the backgrounds"—forests, fields, and seas—in the ennoblement of the human race and the elevation of human character.

Nowhere else has this topic been discussed so largely and

so sanely. The rapidly increasing interest in rural matters has been fed with the silly, sentimental "Life-Study of a Farmer's Wife" type of article—much fancied by certain periodicals—on the one hand, and innumerable treatises on the science and business of agriculture, on the other. This book is totally beyond either of these classes. It deals with the great truths that must be understood in any permanent development of country life, and deals with them adequately. The style is sometimes a trifle obscure, but for the most part pleasing and suitable.

The reader is glad to learn that this is the first of a series called "The Background Books", in which Mr. Bailey will from time to time present his personal experiences on other allied subjects.

A Little Book of Local Verse, by Howard Mumford Jones, is a real advance toward a literature of the Middle West. It contains no work that can be called great, but holds much of promise and much that is far above the average of current magazine verse. *An Abandoned Cemetery* and *From Trempealeau* are the major pieces, and while not the most perfect, are lit with imagination and are at times lifted into a fine significance. The *Railway Sketches* possess a realistic fabric containing the color that vision finds, and *Rain on the River* is a clever bit of fancy and metre which would, however, gain by a polishing of some of its parts. *Movies* is a slight thing but one that has more significance probably, than some of the longer poems. The book cancels some of its value by its last poem, *You who have read this book*, which is a rather crude disavowal in free verse, of a "message." Such a thing, if well done, would furnish a clever and happy colophon, but since it is not well done it can only detract from the worth of the little book, which other-

wise deserves much praise. Mr. Jones is considerably more than a versifier, and should in time, if he labors with more exacting standards, give the world some fine authentic poetry.

Unusually appealing for the delicacy and quiet reserve of its treatment is Mr. Keene Abbott's *The Wind Fighters* in a recent number of *The Outlook*. It is a story of the land, its gleaming beauty, its haunting tragedy; and through it the winds are blowing always, "grieving in lean times," singing at last.

Deep feeling, dignity, and virile power mark Mr. William Allen White's long poem, *The Kansas Spirit Speaks*, a metrical survey of the history of Kansas, "this strip called a state". The journal *Teaching*, issued by the Kansas Normal School, published it first.

